

EDMONTON

JUNE 1996

Next meeting:

TUESDAY, JUNE 18, 1996

7:30 pm

10112 - 124 St

Lower Level

Coffee will be served. Everyone welcome!

For further information please call
Cindy at [REDACTED] or Lynne at [REDACTED]

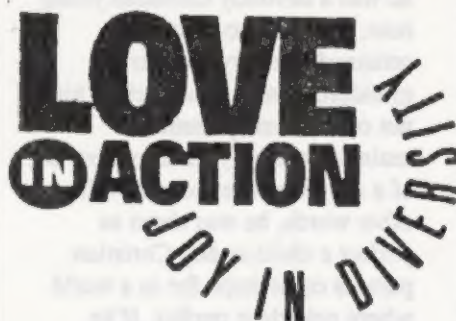
PFLAG SUPPORT

A MOTHER'S "COMING OUT" STORY

I work as a secretary for a family business - a father and his two sons.

One of the sons has recently become very involved in the charismatic movement in his church. Before the passing of Bill C-33 he started writing to Prime Minister Chretien and other politicians saying that the bill should not be passed as it would destroy all religious and family values. He was typing the letter on his computer and asked me into his office to assist in the spelling of a couple of words. I quickly read the letter - but as I read it my heart became very heavy laden. I was

experiencing my first direct discrimination against my son.



Begrudgingly, I helped him, said nothing and went back to my own desk - heart pounding and disappointed in myself as I had been afraid to speak up. Ten minutes later he was at my desk to use the fax machine having copied his letter so other people could also sing and fax. While he was faxing his letter to Prime Minister Chretien he asked me, "do you want one to sign?" I politely said, "No thank you." By this time I was beginning to shake, my inner self tearing apart, praying for enough courage to speak up for my son. After about five minutes I finally asked him if we could go into one

of the back offices as I had something to share with him. I told him the reason I could not sign one of those letters was because I had a gay son and one of the last things I would do would be to discriminate against my own child. We had a discussion on whether it (homosexuality) is a choice, on the feelings of gay and lesbian persons, on how difficult their lives are and that the last thing they need is to be religiously discriminated against. We talked about the love of God which, the boss's son explained, was the direction and focus of his work on his religious faith. **Until I pointed out how hurtful being discriminated against is, he said he'd never looked at it that way.** The end result was that no more letters were faxed and a young man was now choosing to try to love and understand "different" people. However the fear I had experienced could only be a fraction of what gays and lesbians feel when encountering discrimination by the religious right. My heart, prayers and love goes out to them. Though having attended only two PFLAG meetings since my son's coming out in December 1995, I do believe that the sharing, the strength and the support shown to me by other parents has been a big help in giving me the strength required to stand up for what I believe in.

Karen

"A Proud Mother"

PLEASE NOTE - REGULAR SUPPORT MEETINGS WILL BE HELD
JULY 16, 1996 & AUGUST 20, 1996 AT 7:30 PM at GLCC.

BONE FAMILY'S STORY

By Paul W. Egerton, Ph.D.

<http://www.pe.net/bidstrup/parendat.htm>

What do you say after someone you love says, "I'm gay"? That's the question our family faced a decade ago when the oldest of our six sons told his mother and me that he is homosexual. That is the question the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) family of faith recently faced because of three young men in a fiery furnace whose personal integrity would not allow them to deceive us about their sexual orientation during the process leading toward ordination. That's the question many congregational families will face in the future as more and more of their lesbian and gay members muster the courage to publically share what they have privately known to be true for years.

I share our family story here, not because it is unique, but because it is a typical account of one way parents respond to the discovery that a child they both love and admire is gay. It is offered with the prayer that it can be helpful not only to other families, but also to our church family as we seek together a place to stand in relation to a reality that will not go away.

Step 1: Deny It

Looking back, we can see six steps on the road we have traveled. Upon hearing the news our son brought us, our first step was to "deny it". Admittedly, we knew very little about homosexuality at the time. After all, what was there to know?

God created people male and female for the purpose of reproducing the human race and provided marriage as the proper setting for it. Sexual activity

between people of the same sex was obviously a distortion of nature prohibited by both Scripture and common sense. What more does one need to know than that?

While we know very little about homosexuality, we knew a great deal about our son. He didn't fit the image we had of a homosexual at all. He had been a delightful child to raise; bright as a whip; multi-talented; self-directed and self-disciplined; honest and ethical to a fault; helpful and caring toward others. He graduated from high school with honors and from California Lutheran University with highest honors. Beyond that, he was a devoutly Christian young man, planning to enter the ordained ministry like his grandfather and father before him, not out of some pressure to maintain a family tradition, but out of a deep inner sense of call. In other words, he was about as perfect a child as any Christian parents could hope for in a world where nobody is perfect. If he thought he was gay, he must just be going through a phase of some kind and "when the right girl comes along" he will resolve it. In the meantime, let's all keep our heads and not panic.

Step 2: Explain It

When we could no longer deny it, we sought to "explain it." How had this fine young man become gay? What caused it? **Our state of ignorance was such that only two options seemed possible.** Either he had chosen a style of life in contradiction to nature and the will of God, or his mother and I in our parenting had unknowingly contributed to a perverted development of his sexuality. **Either his mother had emasculated him by smother love or I had been a weak, ineffective**

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and/or too much absent father.

Since we could not convince ourselves that this highly ethical boy had suddenly chosen a deviant style of life, the fault must have been our inadequacy as parents. We explored that explanation for a while but, self-serving as the conclusion was, we could not realistically see where that had been so in this case. **So we went in search of other explanations. At this point our education began.** We learned that there are several theories on the causes of homosexuality; that they stand in conflict with each other; that none of them can be sufficiently established to produce a consensus; and the only certain truth at this point in time is that "nobody really knows". The fact is that across time, nations, races, cultures and classes, a consistent percentage of persons in all populations just are homosexual and the fault cannot be laid at anyone's feet.

Step 3: Fix It

When we could neither deny it nor explain it, we then sought to "fix it". There were two options open: divine intervention and psychological therapy. As a devout Christian who knew from early childhood that something was very different about him and who suspected from adolescence that this difference was something unacceptable to God, our son had devoted himself to prayer and trust in the grace and power of God. Preachers said God loved all people unconditionally and could change persons who came to him with a broken and contrite heart. **So for years, night after night in the privacy of his closet, he took his broken and contrite heart to the throne of grace. But God did not change him.** Did that mean he was so defective that even a

gracious God did not love him? What else is a teen-age mind to conclude? (**Preachers, beware! Some people believe what you say.**)

Since divine intervention failed, perhaps psychological therapy could succeed. So we pursued that, only to discover that most psychiatrists and psychologists had long since come to the conclusion that homosexuality is not an illness and that no known system of treatment can change it. Homosexual behavior can be changed by conditioning toward celibacy, but the inner affectional orientation of constitutional homosexuals is not changed. And that was the issue for us, because sexual activity was not the problem. In short, there was no known way to fix it. **The best that therapy can do is help gay and lesbian persons accept the reality of their being before the socially imposed shame of it, and the personal pain of it, drives them to despair, drink, drugs, or death by suicide, all of which it does daily to numerous persons in our world.**

Step 4: Mourn It

When you can't deny it, explain it, or change it, the only thing left is to "mourn it". Parents have two choices at this point, and both of them involve some form of death. On the one hand, you can choose the death of rejection and separation from your child. You can say, "If that's the way you are, you're no son of mine." You can cut off relations as though the child never lived or as though the child has died. That's an option many parents have taken and an option many congregations have taken in response to their lesbian and gay members. But quite frankly, that was never an option for us because

we could not believe this son we knew so well was in any sense a perverted person.

The other option is to suffer the death of your own ignorance, prejudice, opinions, attitudes and misunderstandings. Then you mourn the loss of a nice and tidy world view in which every thing its neatly into boxes of black or white, right or wrong, true or false. And you mourn the loss of security provided by a few biblical passages that can tell you which is which so you don't have to take the responsibility for making a judgment.

Along with those losses goes the death of your hopes and dreams of ordinary happiness for your child, particularly as that comes through the joys of marriage, children and a life approved by family, friends, church and society. and in our son's case, there is also the probable death of any hope for ordination into the ministry to which he has always felt called by God, unless he is willing to sacrifice for it all experiences of human love expressed through physical intimacy. **During the process of mourning, his mother and I came to realize how close we were to shifting the focus from our son's struggle to our own. That final form of death for parents is to recognize that their pain is secondary to their child's suffering and to take up their role as supporters of the life they brought into the world, the life their child has to live out in the world.** When that happened for us, the question became, "How is he handling this in terms of his own life, health and happiness?" It is his problem, not ours. He doesn't need us to increase his struggle by making the problem our own and then looking to him for a solution.

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Step 5: Accept It

When he came to the place where he could accept the reality of his sexual orientation as given, we were able to take the next step and "accept it". It was at this point that we remembered one version of the Serenity Prayer: "Lord, give us the serenity to accept what cannot be changed, the courage to change what can be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference."

For us that has come to mean the acceptance of something in the being of our son that neither we nor he would have chosen, something neither he nor we can change. More than that, it has come to mean seeking change in those things which can be changed, namely the attitudes toward and understandings of homosexuality that remain dominant in both church and society. **For we have come to realize that the biggest problem in being gay is not the gayness, but the reaction of heterosexuals to it.** And we want to join with those who seek the ways of healing and wholeness at this point of pain in our world..

Step 6: Celebrate It

At this juncture on our journey we are in the process of taking a sixth and final step: "celebrate it!" We may not be fully on this step yet, but our weight has clearly shifted there. **Where you end up on this journey depends on what you think homosexuality is.** To what may it be rightly compared? Your answer to that will finally determine the place you will stand.

At least four options are open for consideration:

First, you might say that homosexuality is a conscious and defiant rebellion against the laws of God and nature. In that case, it

is simply sin and our only proper response is the announcement of God's judgment, the offer of grace, and a call for repentance. But is that what homosexuality is?

A second option is to say that homosexuality is an illness like alcoholism, where behavioral activity brings the bondage of addiction that only total abstinence can break. If that's the case, then clearly celibacy is a sufficient solution to the problem. But is that what homosexuality is?

A third option is to say that homosexuality is a tragedy of nature, something never intended by God and contrary to his will, but something that happens regularly in our world nonetheless. It is one more demonstration of the effect of the Fall in the world. In that case, it is like mental retardation, a condition for which the victim is not responsible, which cannot be changed, but something we can never call good. If that's what it is, then shouldn't we treat homosexuals with the same compassion and understanding as we grant to others who innocently suffer as victims of a broken world? Then shouldn't we make special rules for them so that life can be as full as possible within the limits of their deformity? When people have no legs, we provide wheelchairs as substitutes and set aside special parking spaces which are illegal for others to use but permitted for them. Could we provide homosexuals with a substitute structure for marriage that would allow them the personal fulfillment that comes through sanctioned committed relationships. But is that what homosexuality is?

Finally, we might say that homosexuality is one of the varieties of nature, one of those delightful differences that

regularly appear in counterpoint to the ordinary norm. In that case, it is like left-handedness, a minority condition in a world where most people are right-handed and a few are ambidextrous, but a natural variation that has its own contribution to make to the wholeness of the world. There was a time when people considered left-handedness so deviant that it had to be punished or changed. But in trying to force that change, we discovered the same thing we're finding with homosexuality now: attempts to change them don't change them but only cause more serious problems. Once that was clear in regard to left-handedness, we were freed to discover some positive benefits southpaws offer the world. Professional baseball teams, for example, value them highly. In fact, you can't win a championship without some lefties. Is that what homosexuality is? If so, we can celebrate it as a gift of God. Unfortunately, there are no experts right now who can answer our questions or tell us which of the above options will turn out to be true. **All we can do is digest the best information available from scientific research and search the Scriptures for what they do and don't say, praying that the Spirit will lead us into all truth.** In the meantime, we all walk by faith and run with risk. Each of us will place our own bet and be responsible for it. As for me and my house, we're putting our money on the "celebration" line. We would rather err on the side of helping hurting people than on the side of hurting helpless people. May God have mercy on us.

Paul Egertson was a pastor of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, North

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Hollywood, Calif. He has since been elected bishop of the Southern California (West) Synod of the ELCA.

PFLAG EDUCATION

Louise MacKay, a Ph. D. student in Counselling Psychology is currently working on research which, we hope, will enable psychologists, school counsellors, doctors, psychiatrists, public health nurses, mental health and other professionals to more successfully assist lesbians, gays, their parents and families in their understanding of homosexuality and the related "coming out" processes. Unsuccessful "coming out" processes have so often in the past led to tragedy, e.g. drug addiction, alcoholism, attempted and completed suicides.

Louise MacKay will be exploring both the positive and negative experiences that the adolescents have encountered in their homes. She will also be investigating the parent's/parents experiences of raising a gay or lesbian adolescent

Due to the importance of this research to the well-being of our lesbian and gay adolescents please consider offering one hour of your time to be interviewed by Louise. She needs parent(s) / (grown) child "pairs" for this study.

Please leave your names, parent & child (over 16 years), and your telephone number(s) at [redacted] and indicate your willingness to participate in this study. Your help can do much to reduce homophobia in Alberta!

P. S. Everything you say in the interview must, for legal reasons, remain strictly confidential.

PFLAG ADVOCACY

PFLAG EDMONTON-AREA PARENTS SUPPORT BILL C-33

(Excerpt from The St. Albert
Gazette, May 11, 1996)

St Albert Reform Party member of Parliament voted against providing human rights protection for gays and lesbians Williams believes he acted on the wishes of his constituents.... Although it's a small sample (2 people)...it's 100 per cent ...as far as I can tell by other phone calls and conversations and support around St. Albert...

A spokesperson for a gay and lesbian support group said the new law is long overdue. Lynne MacDonald, a member of the Edmonton-area branch of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) said amendments to the federal Human Rights Protection Act express an important commitment.

"My feeling is it's a step in the right direction but (discrimination) will still be out there," said MacDonald, whose daughter is a lesbian.

MacDonald doesn't believe Alberta will pass similar laws.

"Premier Klein keeps on talking about special rights. But it's equal rights and they do not have that now."

MacDonald said while her daughter was looking for a one-bedroom apartment with her partner, the couple was turned down even though the building had vacancies.

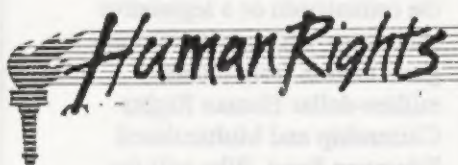
In the employment arena, her daughter held one job for several years then left it for another

position. After a couple of years, when her second job turned sour, she reapplied for her old job, which was vacant.

"They wouldn't hire her back - they knew of her preference when she worked there but they wouldn't have it again."

Cindy Ryley, a St. Albert member of PFLAG, said Williams made a mistake when he voted against the laws.

"If people find out that you are gay, then it is a work issue because a lot of people are still very much against it," said Ryley.



FEDERAL GAY RIGHTS

Gay Rights Meaning up to Courts, Now

(Courtesy, The Edmonton Journal,
May 8, '96)

Andrew Duffy

By adding only two words - sexual orientation - to the human rights act, the federal government has left it to the courts to decide what the change will mean to the lives of Canada's homosexuals (over 2 million individuals*).

"In terms of what employment benefits will flow from this, that will be decided by the courts as far as I'm concerned," federal Human Rights Commissioner Max Yalden said Friday.

Opponents of the bill warned the amendment will open the door to a redefinition of the family, including the extension of

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marriage and adoption rights to homosexuals.

Justice Minister Allan Rock, however, repeatedly characterized the amendment as not conferring any new rights upon homosexuals...

The Canadian Human Rights Act applies to the federal government and federally regulated businesses like banks and airlines; other workplaces are covered by provincial human rights codes.

Yalden said the amendment simply affirms the existing policy of the commission, which has accepted human rights complaints based on sexual orientation since 1992.

The commission now has more than 100 cases dealing with gay rights on file. Many concern the extension of employee benefits - things like medical, dental and pension plan coverage - to same sex partners...

Yalden noted the legal definitions of "spouse" and "family" do not have to be altered to extend full benefits to the partners of gay and lesbian civil servants.

Toronto human rights lawyer Russell Juriansz said previous appeals have shown the Supreme Court to be deeply divided over whether the denial of same-sex spousal benefits constitutes discrimination.

The addition of sexual orientation to the human rights act may tip the scales in favor of those seeking the extension of benefits, he predicted.

(* Editor's note)

PROVINCIAL GAY RIGHTS

Alta Needs Strong Rights
Commission

(Courtesy The Edmonton Journal, May 15, '96)

Shirish P. Chotalia

Albertans congratulate Jan Brown for having the courage to take a stand against extremism in the Reform party.

Extremism is not an anomaly in Alberta: we have seen cross burnings in Provost in 1991, the sale of racist pins depicting aboriginals, blacks and Sikhs in a degrading manner, and recently, a mail bomb was sent to the Calgary Jewish Centre.

Extremism masks fear and hatred of anyone who is different. Over the past several years homosexual Albertans have become the target of "scapegoating."

The intolerance of many Reform party members is mirrored within the Klein government. His MLA's and minister responsible for the Human Rights Commission, spoke publicly about the abolition of the commission and our Charter of Rights.

They accepted firefighters posting pictures of nude women in taxpayer-funded firehalls, and advocated cutting spending for heritage language programming. They did not hide their anger at the commission for deciding to process complaints on the basis of sexual orientation. Instead they placed the commission under review.

To their displeasure, the review panel received over 1700 public submissions from Albertans, and toured Alberta. The ensuing recommendations were that:

- the commission be given its independence from the government;

- sexual orientation be expressly legislated as a ground upon which persons should not be denied a job, service in a restaurant or an apartment rental.

The term of the author of the report, then chief commissioner, was not extended. The proposed amendments to the legislation, Bill 24, entirely disregard our wishes as set out in the report.

Bill 24 fails to legislate the independence of the Human Rights Commission by having it report to the legislature akin to the reporting structure of the ombudsman and auditor general.

It gives the minister, rather than the commission or a legislative committee, authority to allocate grant monies from the new million-dollar Human Rights Citizenship and Multicultural Education Fund. Who will the money go to and why?

It does not ensure that selection of commissioners is made on the basis of merit through open competition. The review report recommended 'an open public process with commissioners selected on the basis of human rights expertise, integrity and credibility.' The government has not implemented a viable selection process to date.

Bill 24 fails to address systemic discrimination. It also ignores the review report's recommendation that the grounds be extended to include:

- source of income;
- political belief;
- pardoned criminal convictions and;
- sexual orientation.

The bill's omissions are as striking as are its provisions: It provides that commission members will now not only advocate, investigate,

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mediate and recommend that matters proceed to hearing, but also they will conduct the hearings. This administrative procedure violates principles of administrative fairness and procedural fairness. **The commission will now be the advocate, investigator, and judge and jury.** Complaints and respondents demand that this inappropriate change be rectified.

Bill 24 should not be passed. Its complete failure to reflect the views of Albertans should be viewed in the context of the recent comments of Reform members who disparaged not only homosexual Albertans, but also black Albertans (and in the past aboriginal Canadians and women).

Their question is disingenuous: Why should a business hire blacks if it hurts its balance sheets? It should be rephrased: Why should a business not prosper from the attributes of an otherwise exceptional employee because of fear and prejudice?

The battle for fair treatment of all Albertans is one to be fought by each of us for the benefit of Alberta. Indeed, white male Albertans have used the commission extensively to deal with unfairness in religion and insurance premium discrimination.

Supporting a strong and independent human rights commission equates to ensuring that the talents of all Albertans are allowed to develop and create the strength of a marketplace that can compete internationally, and create the moral fabric of a society that can withstand the scrutiny of future generations.

Shirish P. Chotalia is a lawyer and a former commissioner to the Human Rights Commission.

It's a Gay Life!

June 1996

"ONE OUT OF THREE"

A letter from Greg Louganis to a former teacher (Courtesy Gay, Lesbian and Straight Teachers Network Fall 1995 Newsletter: E-mail: glstn@glstn.org or Web: <http://www.glstn.org/freedom/>)

Dear Teacher:

You might remember me, though it's been a long time since I was in one of your classes at Valhalla High School. When I transferred there in 1976, at the beginning of my junior year, you and the other teachers probably thought of me as one of the school's most popular and successful students. At age 16, I had just won a silver Olympic medal. I coached the boys' and girls' diving teams and helped coach the girls' gymnastics team.

The following year, my classmates voted me best-dressed, best dancer, and best physique. Everyone wanted to be my friend, and I'm sure most of my peers thought I was the luckiest, happiest guy on campus. In reality, those years were very painful for me. Growing up is tough for everyone, but even more so when you feel different, as I did - for a number of reasons. For one

thing, I was dyslexic, and because of that I struggled to keep pace academically. But even where I excelled, as I did at diving, the success was



bittersweet for me because I could not truly feel I deserved it. When teachers praised me or other students admired me, I couldn't help wondering, "What would they think if they knew my secret?"

My secret, of course, was that I am gay. Earlier, in grammar school, I was called names like "sissy" and "faggot" and even beaten up occasionally. By the time I was at Valhalla, those things had stopped happening to me, though I'm sure they happened to others, and for me

the name-calling probably continued behind my back. But discrimination doesn't have to be overt or physical to be hurtful, especially to a high school student. Every time there's a reverence to homosexuality and the other students snicker and laugh, you get the message: This is about you, and what it means is that you can't tell anyone, ever.

Years later, other students have told me they remember that time differently - that if I had confided in them I would have found sympathetic friends. But at the time, there's no way you can reach out for help. Counseling wasn't an option I considered; it was even more stigmatized then than now. I was more fortunate than many others - at least I was able to partially escape my frustration and loneliness by channeling my energy into diving. But I still felt the pressure of isolation, and I used other means to escape as well. I withdrew from the school scene as much as possible. I would leave right after school and go to the beach, where I eventually met an older gay man. I was lucky in that my experiences with him were positive overall. But what I really wanted was to be learning how to be myself, with people my own age. The only way I

knew how to do that was to do the drugs everyone else was doing - that was the one thing I had in common with them, an easy way to fit in with a group. Plus, taking drugs was a way to deaden the pain.

In my senior year, the sense of having a guilty secret became overwhelmingly oppressive, and I decided to make the final escape. I stole a handful of Valium and Codeine from my parents' medicine chest, swallowed them, wrote a suicide note, and went to bed for what I hoped would be the last time. I survived, but a lot of high school kids don't. **Studies show that an astounding one out of every three gay or lesbian adolescents in American attempts suicide.**

If school was tough for me, it's so much harder for many other gay and lesbian kids. For some, it's a truly terrifying place where they are threatened with verbal harassment and physical violence every day. Today, all high school kids, gay and straight, face another threat: HIV. They know it's out there - I didn't.

Kids need to love themselves enough to protect themselves. And self-esteem is what high school kids are all too often lacking. That applies to all kids, but especially to gay and lesbian kids. They need extra support and understanding. And yet, it's hard even for well-meaning teachers to reach out to them individually, because you don't always know who they are and what's going on under the

surface of their lives. Still, teachers and school administrators can make a big difference. With this letter, I'm sending you a list of suggestions on how. It come from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Teachers Network, a New York-based group that encourages gays and lesbians across the country to write letters like this one as a part of a national awareness campaign. It's not an easy thing to do. Most of us would just as soon not think about those dark days, much less write about them. It's over, we think. But for millions of gay teens it's not over yet, and they need help even more than we did. Please write me back and let me know what you're doing to reach out to gay and lesbian kids at Valhalla, to make their experience easier than mine was, and to let all kids who feel different know they're not alone.

Sincerely,

Greg Louganis

LATE NEWS FLASH

from the Bookworm

Hello, first I would like to apologize for not having a book review ythis month. Aas far as I am concerned every book that was ever printed should be read, "So many books, so little time."

Second, you may have heard that Bob and I are pulling up stakes and moving to Fernie, B.C. While there we are going to operate a bed & breakfast, *Canadian Spruce Bed &*

It's a Gay Life!

Breakfast. Everyone is welcome!

Last, but most importantly, we wish to thank everyone for the support our family received through PFLAG. We will miss everyone, but are looking forward to our new adventure. Take care and keep up the good work.

Elsie

CANADIAN SPRUCE BED & BREAKFAST

661 - 4th Ave

FERNIE, B.C.

1-604-423-6445

Phone the above number to ensure gay-friendly accommodations in the Rocky mountains with PFLAG hosts Elsie and Bob!



HAVE A GREAT FATHER'S
DAY - JUNE 16 !